

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 220765 TOSEC 260154

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FOLLOWING REPEAT NICOSIA 2679 ACTION SECSTATE 6 SEP 76
QUOTE

S E C R E T NICOSIA 2679

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FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN REACTION TO OUR TALKING POINTS

REF: STATE 215513

1. OUR PRECEDING CABLES HAVE DESCRIBED MEETINGS WITH SARKIS, GEMAYEL, AMIN GEMAYEL, PAKRADOUNI, FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN. WE ALSO HAD DISCUSSIONS WITH THE MARONITE PATRIARCH, PERE KASSIS, MICHEL KHOURY, FUAD BOUTROS, GHASSAN TWEINI, DORY CHAMOUN, CHARLES HELOU AND FUAD SHEMALI. WE WILL PROVIDE MEA WITH MEMCONS ON THE DISCUSSIONS. THE FOLLOWING PARAGRAPHS ATTEMPT TO SUMMARIZE THE VIEWS OF ALL OF OUR CONTACTS, PARTICULARLY AS THOSE VIEWS RELATE TO OUR TALKING POINTS.

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2. GENERAL US POSITION: MARONITE LEADERS WELCOMED OUR REITERATION OF SUPPORT FOR LEBANESE INDEPENDENCE, TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, UNITY AND NATIONAL COHESION. THEY ACCEPT TO SOME EXTENT THAT WE HAVE NOT BEEN DISINTERESTED IN THE OUT-COME OF THE LEBANESE CRISIS AND THAT WE HAVE PLAYED A USEFUL ROLE IN CONTACTS WITH OTHER GOVERNMENTS. WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THEY FEEL THAT WE COULD HAVE DONE MORE AND THAT LEBANON HAD REASON TO EXPECT MORE HELP FROM US IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LONGSTANDING FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE CHRISTIANS' PLIGHT. SOME OF THE LEADERS CONTINUE TO SEEK A DIRECT USG ROLE, ALTHOUGH MOST BELIEVE THAT A DIRECT US INTERVENTION NEED BE ONLY THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SPHERES. PART OF THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE MARONITES SEE THE CONFLICT AS ONE BETWEEN LEBANESE AND AN OUTSIDE FORCE -- THE PALESTINIANS -- AND NOT AS A CIVIL WAR BETWEEN TWO LEBANESE FACTIONS.

3. RADICALIZATION OF PALESTINIAN-LEFTIST SECTOR: THE MARONITES ACCEPT THE VALIDITY OF THIS DANGER, BUT SOME FEEL THAT IT IS AN EVIL WHICH MUST BE ACCEPTED IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE DEFENSES OF THE CHRISTIAN-HELD SECTOR. PARTITION IS NOBODY'S OBJECTIVE, BUT WE FOUND SURPRISING SUPPORT FOR SOME FORM OF CANTONALIZATION WHICH WOULD ACCEPT THE EXISTING DE FACTO PARTITION INsofar AS IT RELATES TO THE CONTROL OF MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. EVEN A LEADER COMPLETELY DEDICATED TO THE IDEA OF A REUNIFIED LEBANESE, LIKE SARKIS, ENVISAGES A SUBSTANTIAL DEGREE OF REGIONAL AUTONOMY AS AT LEAST A TRANSITIONAL PHASE.

4. BALANCE OF ARAB ELEMENTS: MARONITE LEADERS DISAGREE ABOUT WHETHER THE PRESENT RELATIVELY FAVORABLE BALANCE IS LIKELY TO SHIFT TO THEIR DETRIMENT. SARKIS CERTAINLY BELIEVES THIS IS SO, AND PAKRADOUNI (PERHAPS REFLECTING HIS CLOSENESS TO SYRIA) REACHES ALONG WITH SARKIS THE CONCLUSION THAT NOW IS THE BEST TIME FOR THE MARONITES TO STRIKE A BARGAIN. FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN, ON THE OTHER HAND, AND PERHAPS PIERRE GEMAYAL AS WELL, ENTERTAIN THE NOTION THAT OTHER ARAB NATIONS MAY WELL REACT STRONGLY

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AGAINST PALESTINIAN RADICALIZATION AND THE PALESTINIAN ROLE IN LEBANON, THEREBY SHIFTING THE BALANCE TO AN EQUILIBRIUM EVEN MORE FAVORABLE TO THE CHRISTIAN SIDE.

5. PALESTINIAN ATTITUDES: SOME MARONITE LEADERS FREQUENTLY AND EMPHATICALLY TOLD US THAT THE PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP DID NOT WANT A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT. OTHERS, LIKE SARKIS AND GEMAYEL, SEEM WILLING TO RECOGNIZE THAT MODERATE

PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS MAY BE READY FOR A SETTLEMENT. EVEN SARKIS, HOWEVER, AND THE FAIRLY OBJECTIVE INTELLECTUALS WHO ARE ADVISING HIM ON THE PROSPECTS FOR CUTTING A DEAL WITH THE PALESTINIANS ARE DISCOURAGED BY INDICATIONS THAT THE MODERATE WING IN FATAH MAY NOT BE ABLE TO DELIVER FATAH, LET ALONE THE MORE EXTREME ORGANIZATIONS, AND THAT ANY COMPROMISE ACCEPTED BY PALESTINIAN NEGOTIATORS STANDS A GOOD CHANCE OF ULTIMATE REJECTION BY KEY PALESTINIAN LEADERS.

6. MUSLIM ATTITUDE: THE MARONITES HAVE EVEN LESS HOPE THAT THE MUSLIMS, ESPECIALLY THE SUNNIS, WILL PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN THE EARLY STAGES OF A SETTLEMENT PROCESS. IT IS ARGUED, ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT A SETTLEMENT OF THE PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE PROBLEM WILL ALLOW EARLY RESOLUTION OF PENDING QUESTIONS BETWEEN LEBANESE CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS.

7. SYRIAN ROLE: MARONITE LEADERS AND CHRISTIAN POLITICAL FIGURES WHO ARE NOT NOW IN POWER ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH THE ASSESSMENT OF SYRIAN AIMS, INTERESTS AND MOTIVES. SOME, LIKE FRANGIEH, APPEAR TO HONESTLY BELIEVE THAT THE SYRIANS WILL BACK FURTHER MARONITE MILITARY EFFORTS AND WILL ONLY BRING PRESSURE TO BEAR FOR A SETTLEMENT AFTER THE MARONITES HAVE IMPROVED THEIR POSITION. OTHERS, AND SARKIS IS AMONG THEM, SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT SYRIA WANTS A SETTLEMENT NOW. ALL ARE APPRECIATIVE OF THE HELP PROVIDED BY SYRIA, BUT NONE ARE TURNING A BLIND EYE TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT SYRIA MAY DISAPPOINT THEIR CONFIDENCE.

8. SOVIET ROLE: THE MEN WE SPOKE WITH SEEMED RELIEVED THAT THE USG RECOGNIZED THE DEGREE OF SOVIET INTERVENTION DESCRIBED IN OUR TALKING POINTS. MANY INSISTED THAT
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THE SOVIET ROLE WAS MORE DIRECT AND MORE CONTROLLING. LEADERS OF THE LATTER PERSUASION, WHICH CERTAINLY INCLUDES BOTH CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL, ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO INSIST THAT THE US HAD AN INTEREST AND OBLIGATIONS TO INTERVENE AS A COUNTERPOISE TO THE SOVIETS. THERE WERE ALSO EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET PRESSURE ON SYRIA AND SUGGESTIONS THAT THE USG TAKE STEPS TO COUNTER THAT PRESSURE AND ENCOURAGE SYRIAN STEADFASTNESS. THERE WAS LITTLE INDICATION THAT THE PROSPECT OF CONTINUED SOVIET PRESSURE WAS UNDERSTOOD TO BE AN INCENTIVE TO MOVE QUICKLY TOWARD A SETTLEMENT. ON THE CONTRARY, THE CHRISTIANS APPEAR TO ASSUME THAT SUCH A DEVELOPMENT MAY "INTERNATIONALIZE" THE WAR TO THE EVENTUAL ADVANTAGE OF THE CHRISTIAN SIDE.

9. U.S. ATTITUDE TOWARD A SETTLEMENT: MARONITE LEADERS GENERALLY EXPRESSED AGREEMENT WITH THE US AIM FOR A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT ALONG THE LINES OF THE JANUARY/FEBRUARY PRINCIPLES AND THE CAIRO ACCORDS. THERE WAS ALSO APPRECIATION FOR OUR SUPPORT OF SYRIAN EFFORTS AND OUR OFFER TO USE OUR INFLUENCE WITH KEY GOVERNMENTS, BUT THERE WAS A FEELING THAT WE MUST INCREASE THE LEVEL OF THOSE EFFORTS TO ENSURE THAT SARKIS GETS OFF TO A GOOD START ON SEPTEMBER 23. THE MARONITE LEADERS ARE BY NO MEANS UNITED IN INTERPRETING THE DETAILS OF THE BAABDA PRINCIPLES AND THE CAIRO ACCORDS, BUT THEY ALL ACCEPT THEM AS A TARGET AND BASIS FOR DISCUSSION. MORE THAN ANYTHING, THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT WHATEVER AGREEMENTS ARE REACHED ARE, IN THE ABSENCE OF A LEBANESE ARMY, BACKED UP BY SOME OUTSIDE POWER OR POWERS TO INSURE THEIR IMPLEMENTATION.

10. SUPPORT OF SARKIS GOVERNMENT: THERE WAS RESTRAINED APPRECIATION FOR OUR OFFER TO ASSIST IN HELPING SARKIS RE-BUILD LEBANESE INSTITUTIONS AFTER A SOLUTION. OUR CONTACTS WERE NOT REALLY UNAPPRECIATIVE. THEIR REACTION SIMPLY REFLECTS THEIR FOCUS ON MORE URGENT PROBLEMS AND THE IMMEDIACY OF THEIR NEEDS. SARKIS, HOWEVER, DOES HAVE TASK FORCES WORKING ON THE PROBLEMS OF LEBANESE RECONSTRUCTION, AND HE WELCOMED OUR OFFER OF FUTURE SUPPORT. ALL THE MARONITE LEADERS ARE AT LEAST EXPRESSING SUPPORT
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FOR HIS ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORITY ON SEPTEMBER 23. THE REALITY OF THIS SUPPORT SEEMS TO RANGE FROM THE CONCRETE OFFERS WHICH THE PHALANGE IS MAKING TO SARKIS TO THE LATENT HOSTILITY AND PERSONAL AMBITION OF CHAMOUN.

11. MILITARY AID: THE MARONITES UNDERSTAND THAT THE POLICY OF THE USG IS NOT TO PERMIT SALES OF MILITARY SUPPLIED TO EITHER SIDE UNTIL THE CONFLICT IS OVER. EVEN THE MORE MODERATE MARONITE LEADERS ARE UNHAPPY WITH THIS POSITION, BUT WITH A FEW EXCEPTIONS, SUCH AS CAMILLE CHAMOUN, NONE PRESSED US FOR MILITARY AID.

12. US DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE: THE MARONITE LEADERS UNDERSTAND WHY WE ARE NOT ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE IN THE CHRISTIAN-HELP AREA. EXCEPT FOR CHAMOUN AND FRANGIEH, THEY ACCEPT THE LOGIC AND PRACTICALITY OF OUR POSITION. WITHOUT EXCEPTION, THE CHRISTIANS WE MET WITH WERE APPRECIATIVE OF THE CHANCE TO RESUME CONTACT WITH AMERICAN OFFICIALS AND WILL BE SEVERELY DISAPPOINTED IF CONTACT BY SOME MEANS IS NOT MAINTAINED.
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